



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

1595 Wynkoop Street
DENVER, CO 80202-1129
Phone 800-227-8917
<http://www.epa.gov/region08>

Ref: 8EPR-SR

June 19, 2009

Tony Ward, Ph. D.
The University of Montana
Center for Health Sciences
32 Campus Drive-Skaggs Building
Missoula, MT 59812

Dear Dr. Ward:

On behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 8 (EPA), I am pleased to provide this letter in support of your research proposal "Health Risks of Exposure to Libby Amphibole in Tree Bark".

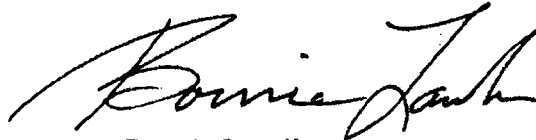
Historic mining, milling and processing of vermiculite from the open pit vermiculite mine located northeast of the town of Libby, Montana are known to have caused releases of vermiculite and Libby amphibole (LA) asbestos to the environment. Starting in the year 2000, EPA began undertaking a range of cleanup actions in the town of Libby using authority under the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act or Superfund. EPA listed the Libby Asbestos Site on the National Priorities List in October 2002 making the site eligible for federal funds to conduct environmental investigations and cleanup.

In 2007, EPA began Superfund investigations at the former vermiculite mine itself and the surrounding national forest area and creek drainages that may have been impacted by releases from the mine. Your past research into the impacts of LA asbestos on tree bark in the area surrounding the mine proved to be very helpful to EPA in their investigations. Your discovery of LA asbestos in tree bark directly influenced EPA to conduct a widespread investigation to characterize the extent of this impact.

EPA anticipates that your proposed research into the potential exposures to humans that may result from disturbing LA asbestos impacted trees under varying conditions will also be very helpful in our efforts to predict human health risks and design appropriate responses to protect public health. We see your research as important in laying the groundwork for EPA's investigations at a larger scale within the area surrounding the mine and within the town of Libby itself.

EPA has appreciated your continued willingness to share information and ideas. We look forward to your research and support your efforts to collect information to help answer important public health questions for the people of Libby and also the public who visit the national forest surrounding the former mine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bonnie Lavelle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a stylized "L".

Bonnie Lavelle
Remedial Project Manager
Libby Asbestos Site
Operable Unit 3

